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AUTHOR Cornett, Lynn M.
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ABSTRACT

This newsletter summarizes the findings of a Southern Regional Education Board investigation of efforts in the region's high schools to provide guidance to students about to enter the world of work. Focus of the summary is on the following areas: the education-work relationship, guidance staffing and utilization; administrative support, preparation programs, job placement, and utilization of funds. Covered in an examination of vocational guidance delivery systems are counselor-centered systems, decentralized systems, the Jobs for America's Graduates program, occupational specialists, career information systems, and auxiliary personnel. (MN)

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REGIONAL SPOTLIGHT

SOUTHERN REGIONAL EDUCATION BOARD

NEWS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH

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Vocational Guidance Delivery Systems

Preparing Students for the World of Work

Taking that first giant step into the working world has always been difficult. For today's youth, the problems are compounded — competition is particularly keen, job opportunities for those without preparation are limited, and employers can afford to be highly selective.

What are our high schools doing to prepare students for that first job? The answer to that question may be "not enough."

Generally, high schools have offered three courses of study — a college preparatory course emphasizing academic subjects, a vocational program, or "general education." A decade ago, approximately 44 percent of the nation's students were enrolled in college preparatory courses, 32 percent were in general education, and 24 percent were vocational students. During the last 10 years, as the range of options has increased and more students are undecided about what they will do after graduation, that pattern has shifted. Now, enrollments in general education are reaching new highs — mostly at the expense of the academic curriculum (see Figure).

Evidence that high school counselors, who for the most part have academic backgrounds, are not equipped to provide realistic vocational guidance was one of the concerns expressed by members of the Southern Regional Education Board's (SREB) Task Force on Higher Education and the Schools. And, in its report, *The Need for Quality*, the Task Force recommends more effective delivery of vocational guidance in the region's high schools.

Through on-site visits and telephone interviews, SREB staff undertook to determine what is being done in the region's high schools to provide effective guidance to vast numbers of students who will soon be entering the world of work. This report summarizes the SREB findings.

Education and Work

Moving from school to the workplace is perceived as a critical stage of transition. Both high schools and colleges are blamed for failure to prepare their students for the world of work. The American educational system, grounded on the premise of preserving all career opportunities for all students as long as possible, places little emphasis on realistic decision making by high school students about their occupational futures. Improving the movement from education to a job may depend on earlier decisions by students about themselves and their futures, even though it is now becoming increasingly common for several career changes to take place during an individual's lifetime.

In this context, counseling programs to help all of our youth prepare for the transition to, and satisfaction in, the world of work are of utmost importance. Vocational guidance involves gaining information about oneself and one's abilities, about occupational descriptions and needed training, and about advisement on available high school courses and the applicability of those courses. It includes relevant data about college programs, postsecondary opportunities, careers for the high school graduate, apprenticeships, and, possibly, job placement. In addition, some students need advice on employability skills, such as job interviewing techniques and the completing of job application forms.

Schools, for the most part, have accepted the function of providing vocational guidance, but have not been overly successful in efforts to provide the necessary advisement, nor have they enlisted or gained help from the community. For some students, the family plays a large part in the process; but for others, this responsibility has been turned over to the school without a commensurate emphasis by the school for the counseling of these students.

In most schools no one assumes primary responsibility for assisting students in deciding on vocational programs. Vocational students do receive some counseling from teachers once they are enrolled in those programs; however, 30 percent of the vocational students in one study were dissatisfied with their choices. Two recent major studies indicate that over one-half of the vocational students and one-third of the general and college preparatory stu-

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

dents never discussed course choices with counselors.

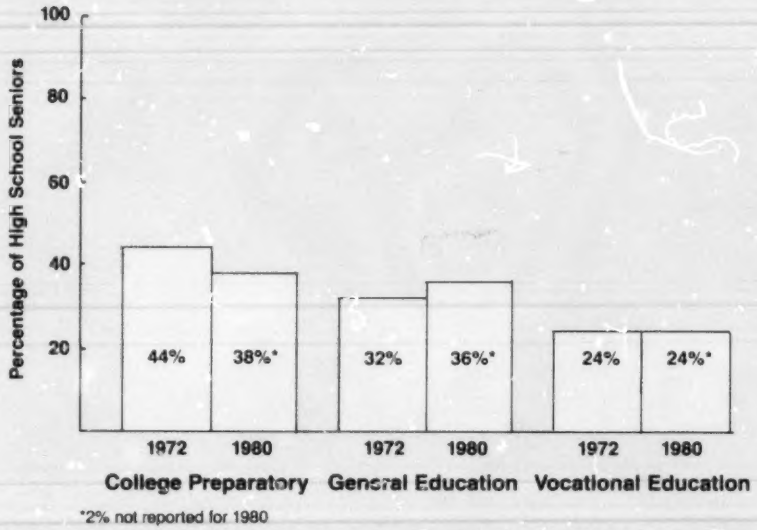
Guidance Staffing and Utilization

Total guidance staffing is a problem in many areas of the country, especially in rural settings; frequently less than half of the students at the secondary level have access to guidance programs and even fewer students at the elementary level. For instance, in Georgia, during the 1977-78 school year, approximately one high school counselor was available for every 450 students. These counselors were unevenly distributed, with some smaller systems having none at all. In regions of the country that have declining enrollments and tight budgets, substantial numbers of guidance personnel have been laid off. Currently this does not appear to be happening in the Sunbelt area.

In addition to the sparsity of guidance personnel in some localities, it is widely known that school guidance personnel have limited opportunity to "guide and counsel." Campbell's national survey revealed that counselors spend 60 percent of their time on duties other than counseling. A recent survey by the Georgia Vocational Advisory Council showed that a majority of Georgia's high school counselors spend 10 to 40 percent of their time on clerical duties.

The responsibilities of guidance personnel may include crisis counseling, testing, scheduling, processing college applications and recommendations, monitoring graduation requirements, dealing with parental concerns, following-up students who do not pass competency testing, and providing vocational guidance. In response to a question about the duties of the counselor, a state guidance director said that most states want the role of the guidance counselor to be flexible; therefore, narrowly defined job descriptions are rare. Because of this, counselors often must assume tasks within the school setting that are not related directly to the counseling function or that could be accomplished by clerical personnel or the use of technological processes.

Percentage of High School Seniors Enrolled in the Three Basic Programs 1972 and 1980



*2% not reported for 1980

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Educational Statistics, 1981*, and U. S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, *Digest of Educational Statistics, 1973*.

Administrative Support

The emphasis and tone of guidance programs and the priority of vocational guidance are largely determined by the school district's central administration. In terms of coordination of the total guidance system, support from the school district's central office appears to be a necessary component in a successful program. The importance of the program, as perceived by the superintendent, is echoed in the principal's response within the school. Relevance of a guidance program and its function are certainly reflected in the roles that the principal sees for the guidance personnel within the school. The assignment of duties that do not relate to the guidance program or lack of support for in-service programs would seem to indicate that guidance is not highly valued. No matter what delivery system for guidance is being used by school systems, the importance of the principal in making the system work was consistently indicated by the personnel interviewed.

Preparation Programs

Graduates of counselor education preparation programs are being employed in a variety of settings, with school counseling no longer attracting the majority of graduates. A national leader in vocational guidance attributes this to low pay and poor working conditions. A survey completed by Hollis and Wantz in 1980 noted that approximately 22,000 students, at all degree levels, graduate each year with a counseling major. Of these, only about 10,000 specialize in school counseling. At one large Southern university, of the 15 counseling faculty, only 3 were engaged in teaching school counseling.

Preparation for vocational counseling is not a major thrust of the total preparation program for a high school counselor. Usually only one or two of the courses taken are directed specifically to work-related information and counseling. Only 10 percent of the items on the competency examination for certification in Georgia deal with vocational counseling. In addition, most school counselors have very little work experience outside the school setting. Woellner's 1980 survey of

certification standards indicates that among the SREB states, only Arkansas requires that secondary guidance counselors have work experience other than in a school. Certification requirements for courses specific to vocational counseling vary, but do not constitute a great emphasis in any state.

Job Placement

When the subject of vocational guidance is discussed, the matter of whether or not job placement should be a function of the schools comes into focus. In the Education Amendments of 1972, Congress mandated the Commissioner of Education to "promote and encourage occupational preparation, counseling and guidance, and job placement or placement in postsecondary education programs as a responsibility of elementary and secondary schools."

The question may be decided on a state level; in Florida, for example, job placement is legislatively mandated in a Student Services Act. More often decisions to include job placement are made at the local level, with great variations within and between school districts. The function of job placement ranges from helping students obtain part-time employment while in school to active placement of graduates in full-time jobs. The emphasis on job placement often may be simply a reflection of the willingness of the counselor to become involved in such activities. Historically, the reaction in public high schools has been to draw back from job placement, partly because the counselors already had more than they could handle. If job placement is to be given a low priority or totally excluded from the mission of a public school system, that decision should be based on serious policy considerations rather than on such incidental grounds.

Job placement is being addressed in some parts of the region by consortia such as the Atlanta Partnership of Business and Education, Incorporated, a non-profit organization established by the Atlanta Public School System and local business, industrial, and political leaders. One of their urgent goals is to seek out students who are academically at the bottom of each graduating class and help them find and keep jobs.

Implications

Schools in the SREB region are spending approximately $300 million per year for salaries of guidance counselors. Are they being utilized in the most effective manner, given their training and educational background? When lack of staffing is combined with the increasing needs of youths who are dropping out, who lack employability skills, or who do not have access to training opportunities, the implications for vocational guidance are compounded. Is it too much to expect that present counselors will have sufficient time or can be trained to do an adequate job of vocational counseling? What other resources can be used to assist the counselors in delivering vocational guidance? Should special personnel be brought into the school to address vocational guidance? These are relevant questions in examining various vocational guidance delivery systems.

> . . . counselors often must assume tasks within the school setting that are not related directly to the counseling function . . . .

Delivery Systems

Counselor-Centered Systems

Most guidance patterns used in high schools today are counselor-centered. In this type of system, the counselor is the major person responsible for delivering guidance to all students. Although such patterns are theoretically promising, often they have not been successful in practice. The discrepancy between *what is* and *what should be* is evident in the vast amount of criticism in the literature, as well as the concerns voiced by students, parents, teachers, administrators, and outside agencies. This is not to say that this model has not worked, in some schools, for the effective delivery of vocational guidance.

In a high school visited in a rural community in northeast Georgia, the guidance counselor apparently has responded well to the needs of the students despite the large numbers she serves. Of the school's 1,100 students, about 75 percent enter the job market upon graduation and over the years the counselor has been able to attend to the vocational needs of this large number of students. In addition to counseling for coursework, she has kept herself up-to-date, has researched local employment needs and trends, and has been able to pinpoint available jobs in the surrounding community through employer contacts that she has cultivated. When she learned that a group of nearby nursing homes was looking for trained personnel, she helped set up new courses in the vocational education department to train students for work in these jobs. Now, under a move to decentralize the guidance services, she spends most of her time preparing materials for use by the teachers. This counselor copes with crisis counseling and considerable paperwork in addition to her commitment to her students in the area of vocational counseling. When asked her opinion on the ability of new counselors to function, she said that they are usually overwhelmed. This counselor demonstrates that the centralized model can work, given an energetic and creative person.

In a metropolitan district in Maryland, one thrust of the counselor-centered guidance system has been to counsel students about the vocational programs offered, since a large percentage of the students in the district are enrolled in general education programs. The vocational

guidance emphasizes job descriptions and opportunities, and available programs in vocational areas. By concentrating in a vocational area rather than on general education, additional students will have marketable skills upon graduation from high school. The program for vocational guidance receives strong central office support, with resources and materials available for the counselors.

One Virginia community has set up an industrial "shadowing" experience in response to the criticism that counselors do not have a realistic view of job markets and, therefore, do not function well in vocational guidance. Counselors from area junior and senior high schools follow workers in many different jobs in a local plant manufacturing television sets. The program includes lectures, in addition to the shadowing experience, to familiarize the counselors with types of jobs available.

Decentralized Systems

If, in many instances, counselor-centered guidance delivery systems do not provide the necessary vocational guidance, then what is the answer? Decentralized guidance systems, in which the teachers deliver most of the guidance services, with the counselor as the coordinator, are one option.

An example of the decentralized approach is the newly proposed plan for comprehensive guidance in the state of Georgia. The system is based on the idea that if each student can relate personally to one adult in the high school, then faculty, students, and parents will be more satisfied with the guidance system. Each teacher, counselor, administrator, and specialist in the school will act as an advisor to a group of 15 to 20 students. The advisor's role includes program planning, parental contact, and social development of each student. In-service training will be provided to help the advisors acquire needed skills in employability training, career exploration and preparation, and individual career development. Each advisor will work with the same 15 to 20 students throughout their high school careers. In centralized models, student-counselor interactions occur on a limited basis. In this decentralized model, counselors would serve as coordinators of the program and as the prime resources for teacher advisors and students, along with their duties in areas for which they are trained, such as crisis-counseling. They will be released from an abundance of paperwork to provide time to use their talents and training to a greater degree.

There is no question that teachers have a great deal of influence on students. However, substantial involvement in a school guidance program on the part of teachers has not been achieved in most schools. Very little research about teachers' attitudes toward guidance has been done; therefore, it is not clear how teachers function in a decentralized model. The attitude of the central office and individual school administration toward such a system, and the teachers' initial involvement in the planning process may be very important variables in the implementation of a decentralized guidance plan. In-service support is of utmost importance, and would be the responsibility of the counseling staff. Leadership is certainly needed to effectively plan, organize, and implement a decentralized plan.

No matter what delivery system for guidance is being used by school systems, the importance of the school principal in making the system work was consistently indicated....

Would vocational guidance assume the role it deserves under this type of plan? Would the teacher-advisor be able to acquire the expertise necessary to advise students about employability skills and the labor market? Would enough support be available to the teacher to give students the proper guidance?

"Jobs for America's Graduates"

Another approach being used to improve vocational guidance is the Jobs for America's Graduates program that is being piloted in several parts of the country. This program is an outgrowth of Jobs for Delaware Graduates, which is a public, nonprofit corporation designed to reduce the high rate of unemployment among the high school youth in that state. The Jobs for Delaware Graduates is a result of the combined efforts of business, industry, education, community, and labor leaders to ensure a positive transition from high school to the world of work. The target population for the program is the general education students, who make up an inordinately high proportion of jobless high school graduates in the state of Delaware. The focus of the program is job-preparation service — helping students acquire pre-employability skills, teaching them how to research job opportunities, and motivating positive work behavior and attitudes. The Jobs for Delaware Graduates program is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations, local foundations, local industries, and the state of Delaware.

One of the five test sites for the national program is the Jobs for High School Graduates in Memphis, Tennessee. Begun during the 1980-81 school year with three high schools, nine high schools are now participating, and plans call for expansion to all of the city's 27 high schools in 1982-83. The targeted population for 1982-83 will be seniors who are in general education programs. The goal is to reach approximately 75 percent of those students. Currently the number of students per job specialist varies between 23 and 42. The job specialists, ideally, have backgrounds in counseling, teaching, and business.

However, the personality of the person is of great importance to qualify for a position. Job specialists prepare students for employment, find jobs for the students, and follow the students for a nine-month period after the job begins. Participation in the program is voluntary on the part of the student, and the job specialist works with the students during free time or before and after school hours.

Occupational Specialists

Another delivery system for vocational guidance is the occupational specialist program initiated by the Florida legislature in 1970. The legislature funded the program to help school boards add personnel to assist those students who were not college-bound or who were potential dropouts to make realistic career choices. Today the program is no longer limited to that population. The goal of the occupational/placement specialists, as they are now called, is to assist students in their understanding and participation in the world of work. The specialist program is designed to be part of a total guidance program aiming at balance through a person who has expertise in the work world, and can provide students with current information about the labor market and its changing trends. State qualifications for the position are that a candidate be 20 years of age, have been gainfully employed for not less than two years in a position other than teaching, and be able to provide written evidence of the ability to relate to young people. These are minimum state requirements, and local districts often impose other qualifications, such as four to five years of work experience. Temporary certification is given by the state, with permanent certification only after three years of successful service, the completion of a local training program, and recommendation by the local superintendent.

In Joyce Chick's recent survey of the Florida program, it was found that 51 of the state's 67 counties have occupational specialist programs in their public schools. Ninety-five percent of the occupational specialists have six or more years of work experience, 80 percent have post-secondary training, and 42 percent possess bachelor's or master's degrees. Over one-half of the occupational specialists are employed in high schools, with the remainder in junior high and elementary schools. The ratio of occupational specialists to students is approximately 1,335 students per specialist. Usually each school is assigned one occupational specialist, thus the student/specialist ratio varies considerably, depending on the size of the school.

The discrepancy between *what is* and *what should be* is evident in . . . the concerns voiced by students, parents, teachers, administrators, and outside agencies.

Good people and staff development are the keys to effective occupational specialist programs. In two systems that were visited, both directors felt the need to get good persons who are self-starters; who like people, particularly young persons; who are outgoing; and who are not afraid to go out and ask for something. One director stressed the importance of top quality in-service training. In some districts, candidates for the jobs are pre-screened by a central office administrator before final choices are made by the school principal, and one district recently instituted a selection committee made up of teachers, counselors and administrators, and an occupational specialist. Turnover of occupational specialist faculty is fairly low so usually large numbers of applicants are available for a relatively small number of openings. Administratively, around 75 percent of the programs are handled through the Department of Guidance and the other 25 percent of the districts administer their programs under the Vocational Education Department of the local school system. In all cases, specialists work in a particular school under the direction of the school principal.

Job descriptions and actual functions of the occupational specialist vary with the philosophy of the local district and the individual school administration. The acceptance of the occupational specialist on the "guidance team" is usually directly related to the principal's attitude toward the program. The physical location of the occupational specialist in the building is often an indication of the attitude of the principal (and possibly of the director of the guidance services in the school) toward the occupational specialist program. If the specialist is housed in the same area as the guidance counselors and given similar office space, then usually the specialist is considered a member of the guidance team. If the occupational specialist is housed in inferior space or at a distance from the guidance personnel, this might be an indication of the administration's negative attitude toward the program. Additional duties that are not a part of those usually assigned to the specialist, such as bus duty, study hall supervision, and the like, may indicate that the principal views the specialist as just another person on the staff who is available for these extra chores. In a recent study completed in three south Florida schools by the local JOBS committee, the actual time spent on vocational counseling varied from 5 to 30 percent of the occupational specialist's time. Interviews with the specialists revealed that their jobs need to be reorganized to eliminate time spent on testing, social problems, and hall duties. Large ratios of students to specialists were also indicated as a hindrance to effectively accomplishing the job.

Roles for occupational specialists within the school setting may also be determined in part by the needs

of the student population. One occupational specialist who worked in a school in a large Florida district where 75 percent of the students had part-time jobs spent quite a bit of time placing students in part-time jobs during their high school career or finding full-time jobs upon graduation. He had many personal contacts in the community and had established a good working relationship with many employers. He "tracked" every graduating high school senior to determine plans for further education or the need of a job after graduation.

Every senior in that school had personal contact with a person who was concerned about his or her future plans. All of the recruiting for the vocational courses in the high school was done by the occupational specialist, who also followed those students as they progressed through the programs. He did employability seminars for teachers and assisted students in obtaining social security applications and completing tax forms.

In another school in the same district, job placement was less of a focus for the occupational specialist. She did not actively seek out employment possibilities, but passed along to students job information that came to her from the placement director in the central office. However, her work focused more on curriculum-based career education. She planned activities in career exploration with students, both individually and in groups. She was often asked by teachers to come into classrooms to present career units related to various subject matter fields. A career information center was available for both teachers and students.

A "career shadowing" day, involving the cooperation of the local Chamber of Commerce and 20 high schools, recently attracted between 1,800 and 2,000 students who spent the day shadowing workers at hundreds of businesses. The day was coordinated through efforts of the supervisor of the occupational specialists and the specialists in the participating schools.

In another Florida school system, job placement was not a high priority. The specialists had no travel money; therefore, they spent almost no time outside the school locating potential employers. They worked with potential dropouts, did testing, and supplied career information to teachers and students. Career days were planned and representatives of many different occupational fields were brought in. One occupational specialist felt that students frequently needed someone to talk to and she was often available when counselors were not. She tried to get students to assume responsibility by helping them to understand how to go about a getting job — for instance, she instructed them on techniques for filling out application forms, reading ads, and preparing for an interview. In this system, those students who did not pass the state competency exam were assigned to the occupational specialist. The specialist would track student progress to help them stay in school, attain the necessary graduation requirements, and make realistic decisions about career options.

> The relationship between school vocational guidance and youth job placement . . . must be clarified.

The occupational specialist program comes under the Florida Student Services Act which provided for the funding of services that could include: career education, elementary guidance counselors, occupational specialists, and placement specialists. Local districts have encountered conflict because funding for the occupational specialist programs competes with that for the elementary guidance counselors. In local districts, choices between the two programs or combinations thereof have to be made. One director of guidance for a large system felt that both programs were necessary and that each should be "line-itemed," rather than one position competing against the other. Although no figures are available, one system reported that the funding for the program was approximately two-thirds state and one-third local. Excluding any local increments, pay scales for occupational specialists are the same as for a teacher with the same experience. The fact that similar salaries are paid to personnel who may not have a degree has been another area of concern in some systems.

Career Information Systems and Auxiliary Personnel

Other possibilities to assist students in making vocational decisions might be career information systems, such as computer-assisted programs, mobile guidance services, and career guidance centers. Employment Security Office personnel or other designated persons may be placed in schools to assist in job placement. Working partnerships with local business and industry, such as the Atlanta or Baltimore Adopt-a-School programs, can be established.

In California, a career guidance center in the San Diego area uses mobile vans to provide in-service training to teachers, counselors, and supervisory personnel in area schools of about 50 local districts. In-depth examinations of changing local labor markets are done by staff of the guidance center. In a rural district in Wisconsin, a career guidance center uses videotapes to capture current occupational opportunities in the immediate area.

Computer information systems provide a variety of options, all of which save time for school guidance personnel. Some could be called career exploration and information systems because they concentrate on such components as values, decision-making, interests, job-clustering, occupational, and postsecondary educational information. Other systems deal with postsecondary education only, often

including information about colleges and financial aid. Some programs are strictly vocational in nature, furnishing only occupational information.

Most systems can be handled by a well-trained student assistant, with results used by students, counselors, and parents to assist in decision making. When deciding on a computerized system, such factors as the target population and whether or not the information can be easily updated are important. For instance, information about financial aid to colleges can become obsolete in a very short period of time if there is no provision for updating. Most seem to agree that computerized information is valuable, but only as an aid to the guidance personnel. The Florida legislature has recently appropriated $500,000 to place computerized occupational information systems in every community college, area vocational-technical school, university, and high school in the state.

In Maryland, some schools employ job associates as an addition to the guidance team. Their primary function is to develop job placement opportunities for students on a part-time and full-time basis. The Employment Security Office places a resident employment counselor in some regional high schools, and permits the use of their microfiche data and job-bank.

The Adopt-a-School program is one of the recent programs directed by the Atlanta Partnership of Business and Education. Participating schools are "adopted" by a business, industry, or civic group. Tutoring, career information, and job placement are among the many services that may be provided to a school.

Conclusion

This overview has presented various alternatives used in providing vocational guidance.

State and local systems need to clarify the role of vocational guidance within the context of the total guidance program. Plans should examine present systems carefully, establish the roles for guidance personnel, and include resources outside of the educational community. The relationship between school vocational guidance and youth job placement as well as institutional responsibility for this function must be clarified. Should the educational system be responsible for job placement? Should community agencies be willing to assume or share the task?

Effective vocational guidance that bridges the movement of students into the labor market cannot depend on school resources alone. Unless local employers cooperate with local school personnel, it is always going to be difficult to open the paths into the myriad of occupations for high school students. Neither occupational specialists nor the most motivated high school counselors will succeed in ferreting out the occupational futures for high school students without assistance from industry. Local employers should be included either in formal council relationships or in less formal structures, but ones in which the school guidance personnel can work effectively.

Even after vocational guidance is established as a priority function, options still remain regarding the types of school personnel best suited to perform this service. However, schools need to designate a specific person or persons who will

Effective vocational guidance that bridges the movement of students into the labor market cannot depend on school resources alone.

be primarily responsible for vocational guidance within each school. The positions might be filled by counselors who are trained and willing to assume the responsibility.

Alternatives for staffing vocational guidance in schools include adding personnel, such as the occupational specialists in Florida or the job specialists in Maryland. Cooperative ventures between business and industry and school systems are shown in the Jobs for Delaware Graduates programs, and the Atlanta Partnership of Business and Education. Occupational guidance centers could be established by school systems on a consortium basis. These centers could be staffed by occupationally oriented personnel and could be a joint effort with the local business and industrial community.

Thus vocational guidance in the public schools is handled variously and with differing emphasis throughout the states of the Southern region. While no one delivery system has emerged as a panacea for dealing with the problems of transition from school to work, several general guidelines for approaching the issue may be offered. It is suggested:

1. that vocational guidance be designated as a priority within total guidance programs by both state and local education agencies. Personnel assigned to vocational guidance should be relieved of administrative and clerical tasks that interfere with the counseling role.
2. that strong, purposeful linkages be established between school systems and business and industry to deliver informed and effective vocational guidance.
3. that schools, and the community decide who will have responsibility for youth job-placement.
4. that vocational guidance in the high school be the direct responsibility of a specific person or persons well-suited for the role. Delivery systems should be chosen with reference to state and local situations, with the involvement of local business and industry.

This edition of *Regional Spotlight* was prepared by Lynn M. Cornett, SREB research associate.

For Further Reading

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NEWS OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE SOUTH

Margaret A. Sullivan, Editor

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